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# SEA LETTER



## OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME MUSEUM

Summer 1975

SAN CARLOS  
1775 • 1975

THE FIRST EUROPEAN SHIP  
TO ENTER SAN FRANCISCO BAY



R. ADOL. 1975

SAN CA

DESIGN BY ADOL

1975



## THE SAN CARLOS EXPEDITION

**O**n a fog-free evening in early August, 1775, the 79 foot Spanish naval vessel SAN CARLOS sailed into San Francisco Bay and became the first recorded European vessel to do so. Pushed by a brisk westerly against a strong ebb tide, SAN CARLOS, under the command of 29 year old Lieutenant Juan Manuel de Ayala, passed through the Golden Gate at dusk and proceeded up the Marin shore, finally anchoring at 10:30 p.m. in deep water off what is now known as Old Sausalito. She had arrived to explore and chart this great natural harbor which had been discovered by land a scant six years before.

Concerned with the threatened encroachment of the Russians and English on the northern Pacific Coast, the Spanish, spurred by the drive of Visitador-General José de Galvez, had, in 1776, commenced a serious effort to both explore and establish a foothold along this shore. In 1769, several land and sea expeditions were initiated to further this end, and the land expedition led by the Governor General of Baja California, Gaspar de Portolá, with orders to found a presidio and mission at Monterey, accidentally bypassed Monterey Bay and thus stumbled into the discovery of San Francisco Bay.

Over the next five years a number of expeditions of exploration were sent to reconnoiter the Bay, and it soon became evident that this vast estuary was a most logical place in which to establish the Spanish presence. Accordingly, Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Maria Bucareli organized an overland expedition to establish a presidio and mission there. The land expedition was to be supported by sea, and the packet boat SAN CARLOS was instructed to sail for Monterey with supplies, and, after unloading her cargo, to proceed to San Francisco Bay, chart the waters, and identify favorable locations for settlement.

In company with two other vessels, the schooner SONORA and the frigate SANTIAGO, whose mission was to explore the northwest coast up to 65° latitude, SAN CARLOS departed San Blas, Mexico in mid-March, 1775. Shortly after departing, her captain, Diego de Manrique became deranged and had to be returned to San Blas. Lieutenant Ayala of the schooner SONORA was given

command of SAN CARLOS, and by this quirk of fate it is he, rather than the unfortunate Manrique, to whom the honor of first entry into San Francisco Bay is accorded.

SAN CARLOS' voyage to Monterey was beset by poor sailing conditions. Both extensive calms and adverse wind and current plagued her, and it was not until the end of June, over three months after leaving San Blas, that she dropped anchor at Monterey.

After remaining for a month at Monterey where her crew unloaded her cargo, carried out repairs, and constructed a redwood dugout for shallow water exploration, SAN CARLOS weighed anchor on July 26th and her launch worked her out to catch a favorable southwesterly for her trip north.

The favoring wind provided a comfortable run up the coast to Point Año Nuevo, but then the north coast's familiar northwesterly set in, and for two days Ayala tried in vain to round the point. Finally, in desperation, he gave up and the next two days he spent beating over 100 miles out to sea. From there, in long sweeping tacks, he worked his way up the coast arriving below the Farallon Islands on the evening of the 4th of August.

After a night spent in tacking back and forth to maintain relative offshore position, he set course for the entrance of San Francisco Bay at dawn. 8 a.m. found him 7 miles off the beach and closing with the land at Half Moon Bay. He put over the ship's boat with his experienced pilot José Cañizares and ten men, giving orders to Cañizares to follow the shore into the bay and locate a safe anchorage.

SAN CARLOS then proceeded up the coast, with the launch inshore, and soon began to experience the vagaries of the currents outside the heads, that are influenced by the Bay. By late afternoon, with the launch some distance ahead, SAN CARLOS had worked in closer to the heads. By 6 p.m. the launch had disappeared from sight. Sunset was at 7 p.m., and with dusk settling in Ayala was faced with a difficult decision. Should he tack back and stand offshore in the Gulf of the Farallons until morning, or should he sail into the Bay in the fast approaching darkness and take his chances on finding good holding ground and a safe anchorage in unknown waters?





Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

The first chart of San Francisco Bay. Soundings were taken from SAN CARLOS' launch under the command of José Cañizares. Of the place names set forth on the right hand side of the chart only two survive, Angel Island and Alcatraz Island, and the latter name was originally used to designate what is now known as Yerba Buena Island.



With a clear sky and a moon rising over the hills to the east, Ayala decided to continue. 8:30 p.m. found him "close upon the mouth with a stiff wind by the WSW, with the topsails hauled down, with foresails set and mainsail close-hauled, under stay-sails and main top gallantsail, the force of the current kept me from making even half a knot"... "using every care and precaution, as between the forces of the wind and the need of carrying all sail, I was in constant fear of a mast or yard's splitting."

Having finally succeeded, in this cautious fashion, in entering the Bay, SAN CARLOS held to the north and more or less paralleled the Marin shore until the wind dropped and the tide began to take her backwards. Ayala then ordered an anchor to be dropped, and, fearing the depth of water, bitted the anchor cable to the mainmast. His anchor went down in roughly twenty-two fathoms of water, and although the crew stood by until slack tide came with two spare anchors ready on the cat-heads, the anchor held in sandy bottom.

At 6 a.m. the launch returned. Upon being questioned as to his failure to reappear the night before, Cañizares told of having found a safe anchorage for SAN CARLOS to the west of what is now called Presidio shoal. He had then attempted to return to the ship, but his crew, exhausted by their full day in the launch, could make no headway against the beginning of the flood which kept sweeping them back. Finally Cañizares had returned to the vicinity of the anchorage he had located and spent most of the night. At 4 a.m. he set forth again to rendezvous with SAN CARLOS, and encountered the same currents at the mouth of the Bay as he had the night before. While still trying to get out of the entrance, dawn came, and he sighted the ship. But this time he was able to make his way across the tide at the mouth and rejoin SAN CARLOS off the Marin shore.

SAN CARLOS remained in San Francisco Bay for the next month and a half. Her base of operations became what has long been known as Hospital Cove, and from there her launch proceeded to all corners of the Bay, even negotiating the Sacramento River as far as Honker Bay.

Ayala, himself, was forced to relegate most of the actual charting to Cañizares since he had not yet fully recovered from a severe wound in the foot, inflicted four months before when one of the

ill-fated Manrique's loaded pistols, found in the great cabin, had accidentally discharged. Cañizares was a highly competent and experienced seaman, but as the chart shown here demonstrates, lack of surveying experience and techniques and the difficulty of approaching the shore over shoal waters made an exact delineation of the complex form of the bay an impossibility.

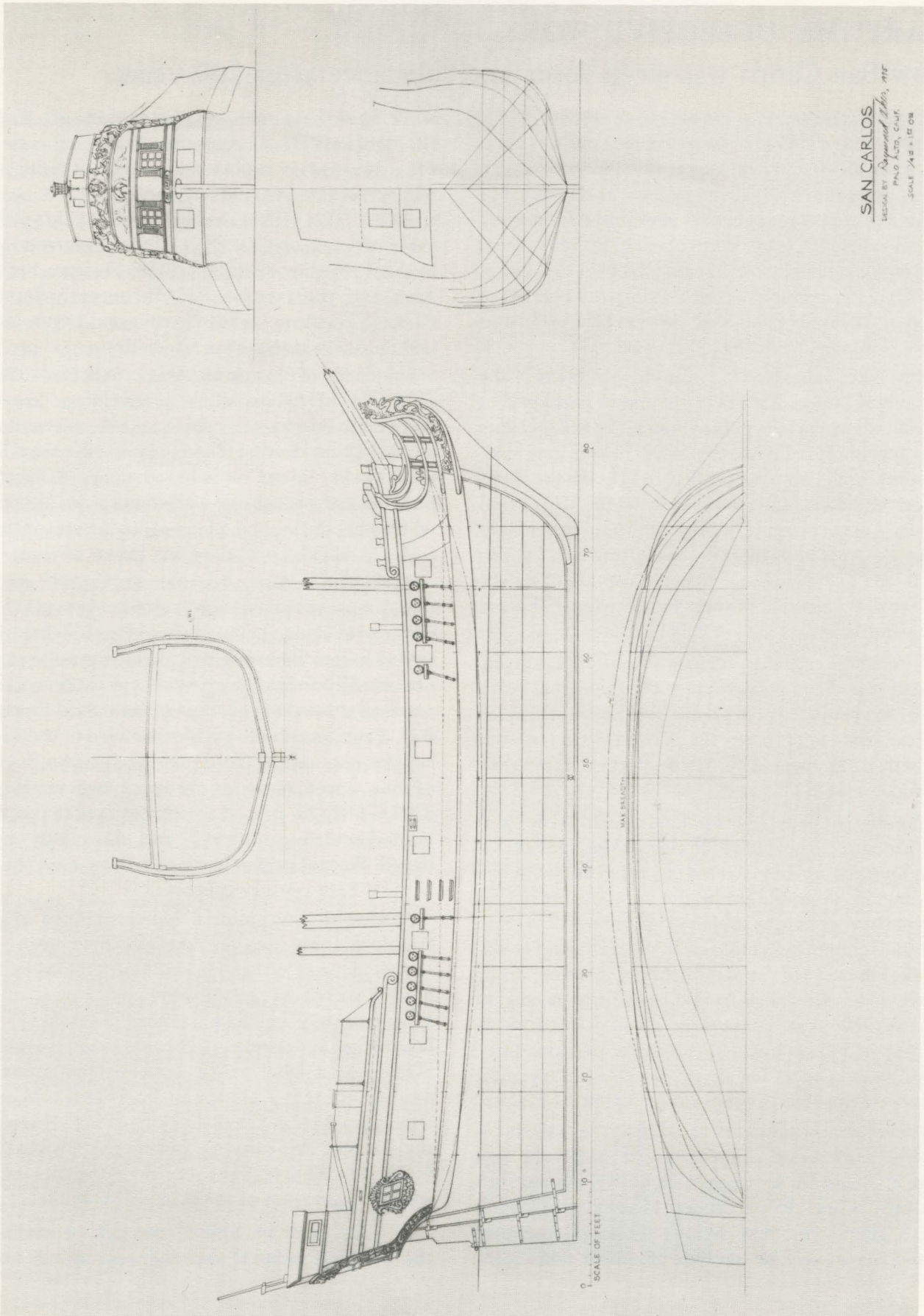
Nevertheless, the Ayala-Cañizares chart of 1775, with subsequent additions made in 1776, became the accepted chart for the Bay, and was not improved upon until fifty years later when a new chart was made by an English expedition under the command of Captain Frederick Beechy.

On September 7th, SAN CARLOS left San Francisco Bay to return to Monterey, but the treachery of the currents had not done with her. While sailing out, about abeam of Lime Point, Ayala noticed the strength of the wind increasing sharply and decided to drop anchor in the lee afforded at Horseshoe Bay and await better conditions. He let go the anchor, but as he did the wind dropped and the current swept SAN CARLOS over a submerged rock which broke her rudder fittings. Ayala set another anchor and lay there over night, complaining of having spun in a circle 21 times during the first six hours. Eventually anchors were set out fore and aft, and the SAN CARLOS lay comfortably until repairs were completed several days later and she was able to depart.

On arriving in San Blas, Ayala wrote his report to Viceroy Bucareli, including these words: "It is true that this port is good, not only for the beautiful harmony that offers to view, but because it does not lack for very good fresh water, wood, and ballast in abundance. Its climate though cold, is healthful and free from those troublesome fogs which we had daily in Monterey, because the fogs here hardly reach the entrance of the port, and once inside the harbor, the weather is very clear." Thus commented the first European seaman to enter San Francisco Bay. One might take exception to his opinions on San Francisco fog, but his favorable view of the Bay has held up for the past 200 years.

These plans of SAN CARLOS, while still conjectural, are the culmination of three years of research by Ray Aker. The *SEA LETTER* is pleased to be the first to publish them.





**SAN CARLOS**  
 DESIGNED BY Raymond B. B. B. B.  
 P.O. BOX 100, CANTON, MASS.  
 SCALE 1/8" = 1' 0"



## MARITIME DETECTIVE WORK

### How San Carlos was given form and substance after 200 years.

*"SAN CARLOS was another one of those little mystery ships which came and went and left their mark on history. We see her as if looking through a drawn curtain, a vague shape. We know that she came into the Bay, came up here and left, and yet we wonder just what kind of ship she was. How can we put ourselves on board this vessel and have the same experiences in our imagination that those seamen had in arriving here, the first Europeans to enter this magnificent bay."*

Ray Aker was speaking of his involvement in the reconstruction of historic ships and in particular of his latest project in pulling away the veil of time that has obscured SAN CARLOS. Aker, long time member and current president of the Drake Navigators Guild, is 50ish, lean and ascetic, with a perpetual quizzical smile that gives him a gentle, yet sad, air. As a boy, he had three dreams in life: to go to sea and eventually become captain of a ship; to become a naval architect; and to acquire skills as a marine artist.

After high school, he started off to actively pursue the first, and entered the California Maritime Academy. Upon graduating he served as an officer and chief mate on Matson steamers, but retired from the sea in 1949 short of having his own command.

Hoping to switch to work associated with naval architecture, his second choice, Aker applied for employment at Bay Area shipyards; but with the decline in shipbuilding in the post-War years, no immediate work was available, so he was forced to accept temporary employment elsewhere. A six-week job opened at Westinghouse Electric doing drafting on the design for a 3" rapid-fire naval gun. Twenty-five years later, Aker is still doing drafting at Westinghouse, but dream careers two and three have blossomed as full-time avocations in his quest of reconstructing the important vessels of history.

Although initially intrigued by the galleys of Greece and Rome, Aker's curiosity spans the ages and he could be as happy with an early nineteenth century Cape Horn trader as with Magellan's VITTORIA. His first serious effort in historical detective work, and to date his most consuming

work, has been the reconstruction of Drake's GOLDEN HIND. As Aker says, most of the models of early ships of exploration are "essentially mantelpiece ornaments and frequently bad ones at that and GOLDEN HIND is no exception." After three years of work on GOLDEN HIND, an introduction by Karl Kortum of the Maritime Museum brought Aker and the members of the recently founded Drake Navigators Guild together and began a long and mutually stimulating association.

Evidence of his interest in GOLDEN HIND shows in his study where a seven-foot cutaway model sits side-by-side with a superb watercolor of her off Point Reyes. The study is otherwise lined with books, books on a broad range of maritime history, and against one wall stands a drafting table where the unfinished plans of his newest interest, SAN CARLOS, are undergoing minor revision.

Having been intrigued with SAN CARLOS for some fifteen years, Aker didn't get down to systematic research until three years ago. Numerous accounts of her trip had been published and occasionally accompanying these were pictorial representations of her entry into San Francisco Bay. Few agreed with each other even in the broadest manner, and in fact a marine artist on the staff of one noted museum produced two versions of SAN CARLOS, one of which depicted her as three masted and lateen rigged, and the other, square rigged. Several popular paintings have even showed her as a 17th century galleon.

Among all the pictorial representations of SAN CARLOS, only two are likely to have been accurate depictions of her rig and hull. One of these, a border sketch of a brigantine on a map of San Francisco Bay by Father Pedro Font in 1777, is labeled as a drawing of the schooner (or goleta) SONORA, a label which is clearly inaccurate; so presumably it is a picture of SAN CARLOS or her sister ship SAN ANTONIO, both of which were on the Hezeta expedition. But SAN CARLOS or SONORA, Father Font was no artist and only a general impression of the ship is discernible.

Initially, Aker set himself the task of reading all the available printed material concerning Ayala's

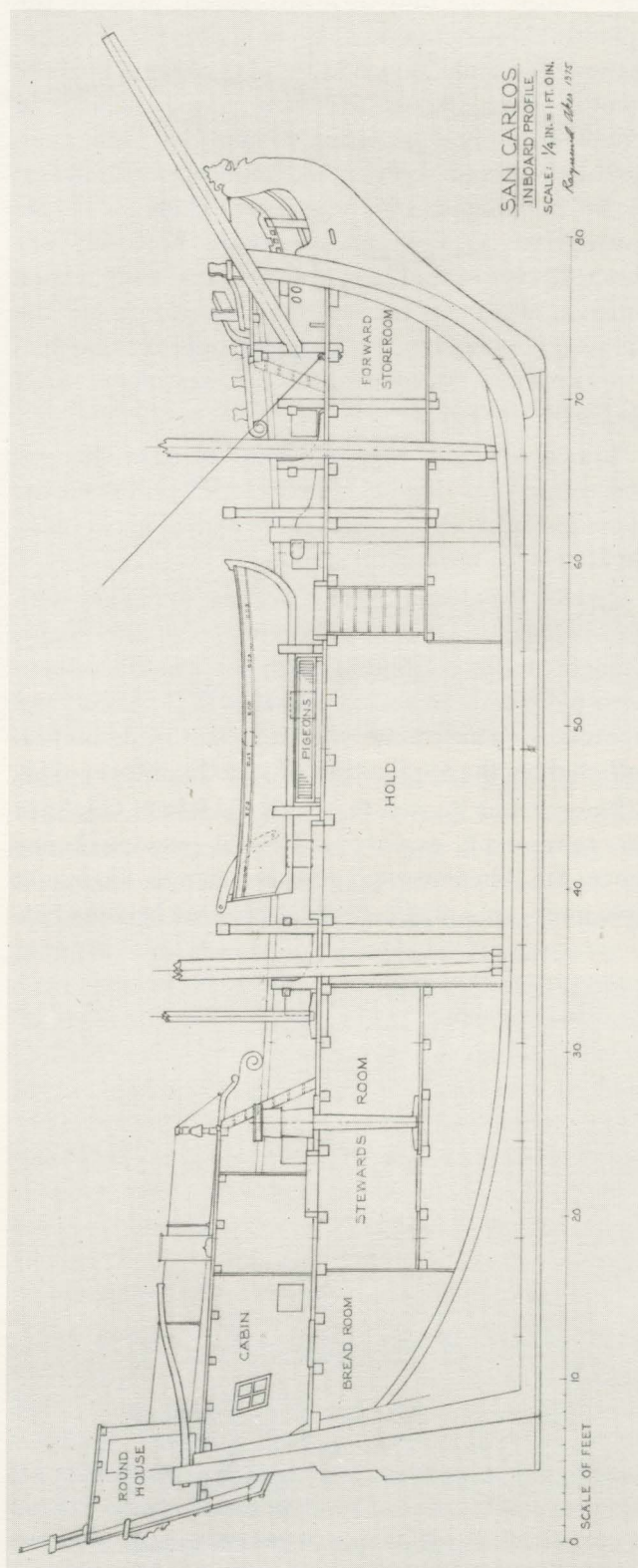


expedition and with the Naval department of San Blas, the organization which had constructed SAN CARLOS and under whose orders she had operated. It became evident that she had been built as a brigantine, with a lateen sail as a main course. Along with a sistership and two schooners, she was built by a team of knowledgeable shipwrights in 1767 on the banks of the Santiago River 26 miles from San Blas. The shipbuilding was carried out under the supervision of an experienced naval officer sent for that express purpose from the major Caribbean naval base at Veracruz. SAN CARLOS' mission was to facilitate the movement of troops and supplies along the coast of Northwest Mexico and Baja California.

To Aker, this knowledge suggested that she probably was a merchantman in design, with perhaps a lower deck to berth troops. Records showed that soon after her construction she carried as many as 225 soldiers along the Sonoran coast. Therefore, Aker's early sketches showed her with merchant configuration and four guns mounted on the quarterdeck, since it was known she carried them on her trip to San Francisco. Her waist was left clear to facilitate the loading of cargo and passengers.

Then in the spring of 1974, Aker's friend and fellow Drake Navigators Guild member, Robert W. Parkinson, found several documents which were to provide the information that would enable Aker to bring the reconstruction to its present state.

Parkinson, who had been doing research at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, examined the microfilmed copies of records in the Archivo General de la Nacion in Mexico City. Among these he found documents of the Naval Department of San Blas which set forth "inventories" of SAN CARLOS in 1767, 1777 and 1778. These "inventories" listed not only every movable or removable piece of equipment, but set forth such built-in items as decks, knees, rudder fittings, bunks, gun ports, and windows. Information from this source also described her spars and sails as well as many of her key dimensions. From this wealth of documentation, Aker built up a formidable list of basic details that gave him most of the parts of





the jigsaw puzzle. All he had to do now was to piece together.

One of his first tasks became that of translating the "codo", the unit of measurement used by the Spanish shipwrights, into its equivalent in feet and inches. The codo first had to be converted into the Spanish vara. Since the vara varied slightly in length from one province to another, and again slightly between the various colonies, research had to be conducted and a decision made as to the appropriate vara. More important, however, was the realization that the shipwright's codo varied substantially from the landsman's codo. It was the failure to recognize this latter distinction that had led most historians to underestimate SAN CARLOS' length.

Armed with this new information, Aker changed and refined his original sketches and produced the plans published here, still tentative, but accurate to the best of current information.

Part of the alteration that became necessary with the discovery of the inventory was the major change of the configuration from a merchantman with plain bow to a naval vessel with beakhead and figurehead. This change was the result of deduction rather than the application of specific information.

Since it was known that SAN CARLOS was built by competent, experienced naval personnel, and since the "inventories" showed her as having 14 gun ports on a single deck, Aker now became con-

vinced that her configuration was that of a typical small Spanish naval vessel of her day. Despite her troop carrying and supply mission, SAN CARLOS must have been built as a man-of-war instead of as an armed merchantman. Unless conjecture were to conflict with tradition, a beakhead and figurehead were called for.

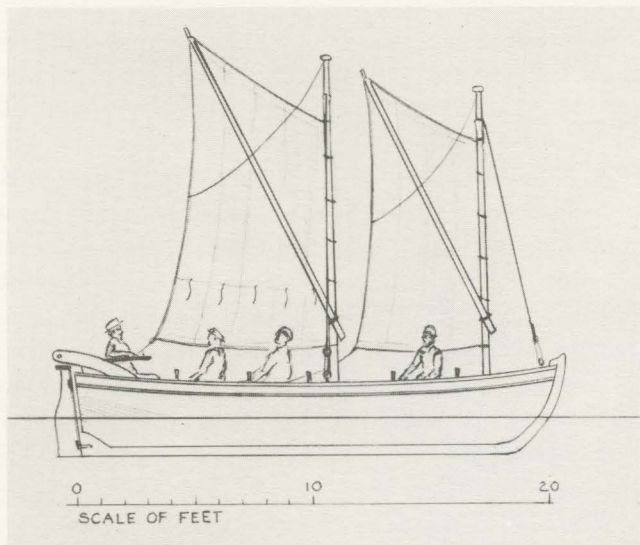
No figurehead is mentioned in the inventory, yet to omit one would depart from what we know of contemporary Spanish naval practice. So a figurehead there must be, and in accord with Spanish custom Aker added a lion. The lion was a universal figurehead used throughout Europe for naval craft, and its stylized treatment was remarkably similar in such diverse countries as Sweden, England and Spain.

Further confirmation of the appropriateness of the beakhead and lion figure-head was obtained when Parkinson turned up the plans, before and after alteration, of a 91-foot Peruvian merchantman which was purchased in Peru by the Naval Department of San Blas. Purchased in 1777, her figurehead had been changed from the likeness of a woman to that of a lion.

More conjectural was the decoration on the poop. Here Aker has used standard decoration of the time; for again in line with custom, it is much more likely that her stern was decorated than plain. Competent Mexican artisans were prevalent as is evidenced by the numerous carvings to be found in churches and missions throughout the country, and it is probable that their services were called upon.

That she had a high stern is deduced from several sources. Father Font's sketch mislabeled "Goleta Sonora" shows such a stern, and there are numerous references to her "round house" in the accounts of the voyage. Father Santamaria in his account of the trip mentions being at his prayers in the round house, in which there evidently was a shrine. Also, according to Santamaria's account, the sound of the ship's bell, located on the forward end of the quarterdeck according to the account, so elated an Indian chief that he gave the startled crew an impromptu dance "on top of the round house."

Another bit of deduction that would have pleased Sherlock Holmes, is Aker's reconstruction of the SAN CARLOS' launch. A complete listing of her equipment is set forth in the "inventory",



A conjectural sketch of SAN CARLOS' launch. Note the davit in the stern for setting and hoisting a kedge anchor.



The first page of the "inventory" of SAN CARLOS which describes the basic hull measurements and the mast height and mast fitting. The "inventory" listed not only removeable gear but detailed such built-in features as decks, gun ports, hatchways and bulwarks.

Bancroft Library,  
University of California, Berkeley

but nothing has been found that sets forth her dimensions or shape. In his log, Ayala states that he sent the launch ahead into San Francisco Bay with the pilot Canizares and ten oarsmen as crew. This provided a fairly good estimate of her minimum length, rowing five men to a side. He then inferred her maximum length after establishing the deck space available in the waist for shipping the launch. This became possible after placement of the masts and fittings described in the inventory. The mean of these maximum and minimum parameters was 21 feet which should be within 6" to 8" of her correct length.

A glance at the plan of the launch shows the curved davit fitted in her stern that is specified in the inventory. This piece of equipment was used in conjunction with a horizontal midships windlass (also shown) to carry, set and haul up a kedge or stream anchor for use in maneuvering the SAN CARLOS in and out of tight spots and shallow waters.

Now that SAN CARLOS has been reconstructed, what of her sailing qualities? Little is said in Ayala's log or in the other contemporary docu-

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Inventario del Paquetor de S. M.  
nombrado Sr. Carlos, alus el Porton que sale despachado de  
Nuevo de San Blas por el Comisario de el, y de la  
Intendencia General de este Reino de Nueva España, para la  
Rada de Laredo en la Pomerania de la América California.

El Paquetor con treinta y quatro  
Codos sea pulgadas de Quilla limpia, tras  
de Lanzamiento a Pico, una a Popa  
dosa, y dos pulgadas de Manga, ocho sea  
lan, y cinco, y medio dicho de puntal, con  
Bique comprendiendo como novena y  
dos toneladas Españolas, segun el exacto  
Arquea, que de él se tiene hecho.

Casco  
El Casco de Maderas de Lino, bien  
recido, y Intexamento Blanco.

Palo mayor  
Palo mayor con traves, y gazo todo  
largo.  
Dos Cachibos.  
Dos Daws  
Dos Chucetas  
Dos Arcosayas

ments, but one may infer from the log and other records of her trips that she was not the most weatherly of craft, even for her day. On several occasions she had been hard put to complete her annual trips to the California missions, and enough concern was shown by the Naval Department at San Blas to have changed her rig to that of a "paquebot" prior to her 1775 trip. Previously she had carried a lateen sail on her mainmast, but in preparation for this trip her mainmast was doubled to the cross trees in the fashion of a "snow", and a gaffrigged fore-and-aft sail added. However, her shallow draft, for entering the harbors and estuaries of Northwest Mexico, undoubtedly continued to contribute to her difficulties in weathering Año Nuevo despite her new rig.

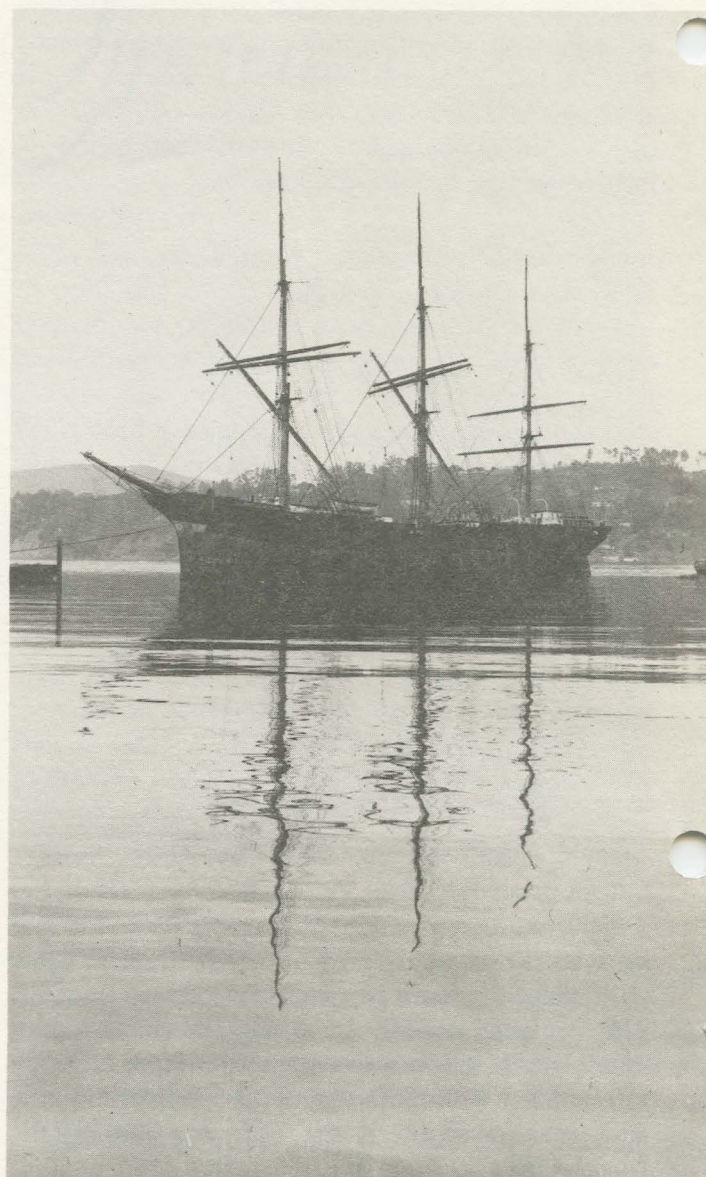
But weatherly or not, SAN CARLOS, the "little mystery ship", has now had the curtain drawn back for all to see. And from Aker's careful reconstruction, we now have an opportunity to relive the experience of Ayala and his crew as they sailed up the windy coast of the Californias and became the first Europeans to pass through the Golden Gate.



## 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF BALCLUTHA AS A MUSEUM SHIP

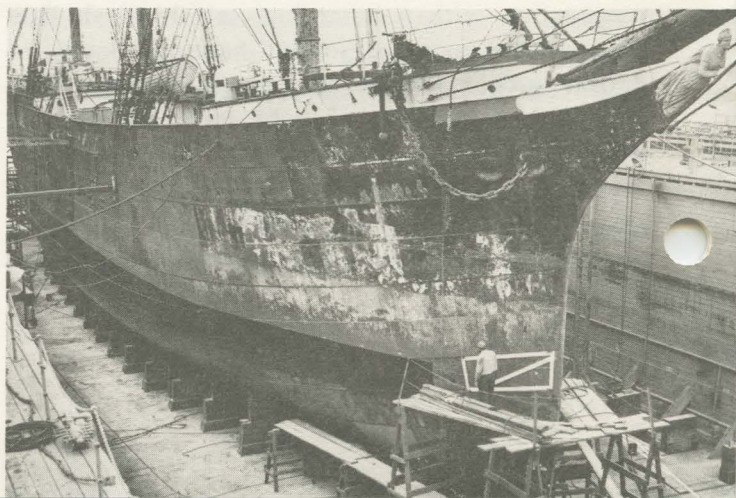
On July 19 BALCLUTHA celebrated her 20th anniversary as a Museum ship. The grand old lady is 89 years old and has experienced many careers including 17 Cape Horn roundings as a deep water cargo carrier. But of all her many lives perhaps her finest is her present one, for during her twenty years at Pier 43 millions of visitors have been provided with a visual link to the seafaring days when ocean cargo and passengers moved by sail, and the San Francisco waterfront was crowded with a forest of masts.

The very fact that BALCLUTHA is still with us is in large measure thanks to the four men who were honored at the anniversary party — original trustees Stanley Dollar, Al Gatov, Max Lembke and Scott Newhall. These four were a part of a small group of dedicated individuals who raised the money to buy BALCLUTHA as she lay in Richardson's Bay awaiting tow to the ship breaker's yard. Thanks to their single minded purposefulness she was saved at the last possible moment. Her restoration was then made possible by a true community-wide effort spearheaded by the Museum, the San Francisco newspapers and the Maritime Unions, an effort in which 13,000 hours of labor and over \$100,000 in materials were donated by Bay Area individuals and corporations. On these two pages we show a few pictures from BALCLUTHA'S recent past to honor those people whose efforts have given BALCLUTHA to the people of the Bay Area and the West.



Tied to a piling in Richardson's Bay, BALCLUTHA was destined for the ship breakers until rescued at the eleventh hour by the Maritime Museum. (left) A sailing card from the turn of the century recalls BALCLUTHA'S days as a deep water man, when she completed 17 roundings of Cape Horn. (below) Saved from becoming scrap metal, BALCLUTHA undergoes refurbishing at Bethlehem's drydock, July, 1954.

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| <b>LONDON TO SAN FRANCISCO.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                       |
| Taking goods at through rates to Honolulu.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                       |
| THE SPLENDID STEEL SHIP                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                       |
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| SOUTH WEST INDIA DOCK.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                       |
| APPLY TO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | MESSRS. MACFARLANE, MCCRINDELL & CO.,<br>LIVERPOOL.   |
| OR TO THE BROKERS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | GUTHRIE & CO.,<br>62, LEADENHALL STREET, LONDON, E.C. |
| <small>No charge for demurrage will be allowed, unless barges have been alongside three clear weather-working days, and in no case will more than 7s. 6d. per barge per day be allowed.<br/>Average, if any, according to York and Antwerp rules, 1890.<br/>Australian and New Zealand Trade Form Bill of Lading to be used. Mates' Receipts will be required before signing Bills of Lading for Water-borne Goods.<br/>Not responsible for detention, demurrage, or loss of any description arising from strikes or locks-out</small> |                                                       |







July, 1955, with flags flying and a welcoming band, the old lady enters a new phase of her life as a permanent fixture of the San Francisco waterfront that she visited so often in her youth and middle age. (below) Twenty years later, four of the men who were instrumental in saving BALCLUTHA are honored at an anniversary party on board the ship. With Museum Director Karl Kortum (left) and Assistant Director Dave Nelson (right) are Scott Newhall, Max Lembke and Al Gatov, all original trustees of the Maritime Museum. Not present, but similarly honored was Stanley Dollar.

Photo: Larry Albee



## KNOW YOUR MUSEUM

The J. Porter Shaw library of the Maritime Museum was established in 1951 with a ten-foot shelf of books in a closet under a stairway of the Museum's building. The books themselves were mostly borrowed from the personal collections of Director Karl Kortum and Trustee Scott Newhall. The beginnings of a library worthy of the name came in 1956 with the purchase of J. Porter Shaw's collection of some 1,600 titles, many of them rare and invaluable research tools. Shaw was an Oakland lawyer and maritime scholar.

Since those days, the book portion of the collection has grown to around 5,500 titles, a modest but intensively focused reference library. More important to researchers is the large collection of non-book material which has been added during the intervening years: logbooks, journals, ships plans, oral history tapes, documents, microfilms, charts, periodicals and newspaper clippings. As might be expected, over those years the library has expanded from the original upstairs closet into its present space on the second floor, and has again in turn, overflowed into three rooms in the basement.

Our bound book collection now includes such useful volumes as a nearly complete run of *Lloyd's Register of Shipping* starting in 1764, *Merchant Vessels of the United States* from 1876, and an almost complete run of *Jane's Fighting Ships*.

We are fortunate that the periodical collection contains a complete set of the *Pacific Marine Review* from 1904 to the present, and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* (official publication of the Sailor's Union of the Pacific) from 1894 to 1927. The latter journals include most of the issues of the *Red Record*, a forceful series of articles calling attention to the hardships and abuse that seamen endured aboard American merchant vessels until the years before World War I, when the La Follette Act did much to improve their lot.

An extensive manuscript collection contains about 500 ship's records varying in diversity and date from several journals of early 19th century whaling cruises, to the logs of the sailing ships of the Alaska Packers Association. Other original documentation includes the personal and business papers of such prominent maritime figures as naval architect David Dickie, and Irving Scott, general



# SEA LETTER

SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME MUSEUM

AT THE FOOT OF POLK STREET, SAN FRANCISCO 94109

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manager of Union Iron Works during its early days.

Among thousands of ship blueprints and original builder's drawings can be found plans of all manner of locally built vessels, from gas launch to luxury liner and from lumber schooner to ferryboat.

The San Francisco Maritime Museum has the most active oral history program of any maritime museum in the nation. Museum Director Karl Kortum and Librarian David Hull, supplemented in the Northwest by maritime historian Harold Huycke, are constantly engaged in taping the recollections of seamen and waterfront men whose memories reach back to the days of sail. These interviews cover a fascinating diversity of ground. On tape are the experiences of the late Tom Crowley whose more than 80 years on the waterfront began in the days when as a runner for one of the shipping agents of the day, he rowed Whitehall boats out beyond the heads in an effort to be the first to throw a grappling hook over the rail of an incoming sailing ship and solicit their business for his employers. An interview with Emil Oberg recounts his summers spent in sailing Bristol Bay boats in the salmon fishery in Alaska for Alaska Packers Association and other days spent in plying the waters of San Francisco Bay in a scow schooner — a 16- to 18-hour day. Another interview with Bert Werder of Redwood City recounts his boyhood on the salt flats of South Bay and his later experiences in Alaska and South America. The many months of interviews with Werder produced almost five miles of tape!

In the early years, the library operated on the intimate knowledge of the collection by the late librarian Al Harmon. Rather than any formal system of cataloguing, Harmon, who held court on

weekends to all who wanted maritime information, could reach or find almost any book in the library. With Harmon's death in 1972, present librarian David Hull was faced with the sizeable task of creating an institutional memory, something that could survive the lifespan of individuals. Aided by assistant librarians Isabel Bullen and Barbara Fetesoff, Hull has spent the last three years involved in cataloguing the 21-year-old collection. At present, this task is approaching the half-way mark, and effective use of the catalogue for research is fast becoming a possibility. Hull hopes to be at that point, in the not too distant future, where the library can once again be open on occasional Saturdays to accommodate those who find it impossible to visit the Museum on weekdays.

Hull, operating on a meager budget of \$2,000 a year for all his materials, supplies and part-time assistance, has been forced to limit the rate of progress in his primary task of cataloguing. However, the generosity of members and friends who have donated books has enabled the library to augment its budgeted funds with proceeds from the sale of duplicates and out-of-field materials. In addition, gifts from interested friends have provided key funds for special projects. The oral history program has been made possible over the years by gifts from the Roth family, and a recent donation from Jack Bradley of Santa Ana will hopefully make possible the acquisition of a copy of the California State Library's index to ships reported in San Francisco newspapers from 1848 to 1940. Building the collection through purchases is a dream of the future, yet generosity such as these two examples has allowed our library to continue to build in a modest fashion while cataloguing goes forward.